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The Daily Mississippian

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Baseball improves to 21-2 on season



TOP PHOTO: Members of the Ole Miss baseball team celebrate after defeating Tennessee 5-0 on Sunday.
BOTTOM LEFT: Ryan Olenek signs baseballs for young fans after the game against Tennessee on Sunday.

» **SEE PAGE 7** for a recap of all the Ole Miss baseball action you may have missed over break.

» **SEE THEDMONLINE** on Tuesday for coverage of the next game

Basketball coach introduced tonight

LANA FERGUSON
EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

The Ole Miss men’s basketball team has a permanent head coach again.

The school announced its hiring of Kermit Davis, Middle Tennessee’s current coach, in a statement last Thursday, March 15. He’ll be publicly introduced at 5:30 p.m. Monday in The Pavilion.

This decision comes a little more than a month after former head coach Andy Kennedy resigned mid-season after 12 years with the Rebels, which immediately began a coaching search.

Davis, a Leakesville native, said he is honored by his selection as head coach and is excited to return to coaching in his home state.

“We are extremely grateful to Chancellor Vitter and Ross for giving me the opportunity to lead such a prestigious program in the best basketball league in America,” Davis said. “Coming back to my home state of Mississippi to build a national brand is absolutely a dream come true for us. I am Mississippi Made and cannot wait to join the rest of the Ole Miss family.”

Athletics Director Ross Bjork said Davis was the clear choice to lead the Ole Miss program.

SEE KERMIT DAVIS PAGE 3

DM wins best newspaper at SPJ; students win 10 awards

LANA FERGUSON
EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

The Daily Mississippian was named best daily student newspaper for the fourth year in a row, theDMonline.com won best affiliated website and University of Mississippi students won a total of eight individual awards in the 2017 Society of Professional Journalists Mark of Excellence Region

12 competition.

UM students placed first in nine categories, and one student earned finalist recognition. SPJ honors one first-place winner and up to two finalists in each category.

Region 12 includes universities in Mississippi, Arkansas, Tennessee and Louisiana. Some categories are separated for small and large colleges. Ole Miss competes in the large

university category. Entries are judged by professional journalists.

All first-place winners advance to judging for national awards, competing against first-place winners in the other 11 regions. National winners will be announced in May.

The regional conference and awards ceremony were during the weekend of March 16 in Little Rock, Arkansas.

First-place individual winners were:

- Devna Bose, feature writing
- Marlee Crawford, breaking news photography
- Lauren Layton, online/digital feature videography
- Jules Marcantonio, television general news reporting
- Ariyl Onstott, online news reporting
- Jake Thrasher, editorial cartooning
- Clara Turnage and Malachi Shinault, online feature reporting

Grant Gaar was a finalist in the television feature reporting category.

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COLUMN

BRIDGE Act brings focus to local politics

JOSH BAKER

STAFF WRITER

This month, Mississippi Lt. Gov. Tate Reeves submitted a bill for the “BRIDGE” Act, or the “Building Roads, Improving Development, and Growing the Economy Act.”

Primary funding for this legislation comes from the recently proposed issuance of new bonds to pay for these projects. The bill will be returning to the Senate this week pending negotiation.

This bill would bring noticeable change in infrastructure quality to places like Corinth, Ripley and especially Jackson because the majority of the funds will be diverted to the capital’s metro area.

Originally, funding for the bill was earmarked to come from the state’s “rainy day fund,” which is set aside for

natural disasters or times of emergency. However, criticism of this funding method led to the proposal of a billion-dollar bond issuance that is now part of the BRIDGE Act.

In the latest round of voting by the House, a previously included provision giving the governor, rather than the Mississippi Department of Transportation, power over the fund was removed, while an additional provision was also tacked on this round of voting by the House.

This add-on legislation requires an additional \$110 million in tax revenue to be placed into the BRIDGE Act fund, diverting much-needed dollars from public education, healthcare and law enforcement.

It is now apparent that this bill will increase the

importance of local elections, because voters will have to choose who they think will responsibly use these newly designated funds for their communities.

The removal of \$110 million of tax revenue from public services also indicates that these legislators now have no intention of raising taxes to counteract the decrease in tax revenue as a result of this diversion. They simply have no incentive to raise taxes for existing expenses after having diverted the funds to cover the bill’s expensive price tag, which is above and beyond the expenditures of the BRIDGE Act that are covered by the new bond issuance.

Mississippi’s government has a history of being too conservative with its tax policy, as evidenced by the

recent cut of state corporate taxes, leading to a decrease in state revenue, with no government investments to counteract that cut. This corporate tax cut came in response to a wave of other states doing the exact same thing as a way to incentivize big corporations to focus more on their respective states.

The proposed BRIDGE Act does address a problem many mayors and local officials have been highlighting for years: the need for local governments to take responsibility for their communities’ infrastructures. How this proposed legislation will impact state and local politics remains to be seen.

Josh Baker is a freshman finance major from Houston.

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The Daily Mississippian welcomes letters to the editor. Letters should be e-mailed to dmletters@olemiss.edu.

Letters should be typed, double-spaced and no longer than 300 words. Letters may be edited for clarity, space or libel. Third-party letters and those bearing pseudonyms, pen names or “name withheld” will not be published. Publication is limited to one letter per individual per calendar month.

Letters should include phone and email contact information so that editors can verify authenticity. Letters from students should include grade classification and major; letters from faculty and staff should include title and the college, school or department where the person is employed.



MISSISSIPPI
press
ASSOCIATION

MEMBER NEWSPAPER

KERMIT DAVIS

continued from page 1

"After assessing the entire landscape of college basketball and speaking to basketball experts across the country to determine the greatest fit for Ole Miss basketball, the answer was clear – Kermit Davis is the best coach and best leader to take our program to the next level in the SEC and NCAA," Bjork said.

Bjork said Davis stood out from the rest of the possible hires during the coaching search.

"Coach Davis also possesses a great sense of purpose for his program and does it the right way off the court," Bjork said. "During the process, coach Davis' energy, drive and vision for our program was unmatched, and we can't wait to welcome him and his family back to the great state of Mississippi and into the Ole Miss family."

Davis boasts 36 years of coaching experience and has led five different programs to conference championships. He played basketball for Mississippi State before graduating in 1982 and later began his coaching career there as a graduate assistant.

Kermit has been with Middle Tennessee since 2002 and led the team to three NCAA Tournament appearances during that time. Kermit's Blue Raiders gained national attention in 2016 after upsetting Michigan State in the tournament's first round.

Annual service award honors faculty, staff

KENDALL PATTERSON
STAFF WRITER

Faculty and staff play an active role in students' daily lives year round, and the Thomas F. Frist Student Service Award makes time once a year to recognize some of those individuals.

In its 22nd year, the award will go to one faculty member and one staff member who exceed their call of duty and go out of their way to be of service to students.

Last year, rather than the usual two awards, three were given: two to faculty members – political science professor Robert Brown and modern languages professor Donald Dyer – and one to staff member Whitman Smith, director of admissions at the university.

As the committee members narrowed down which faculty member should receive the 2017 award, they concluded that they couldn't decide on just one.

"There were these two

extraordinary nominations, and to pick one was a challenging difficulty," Kenneth Sufka, 2006 Frist Award winner and current member of the selection board, said.

The selection board, which is comprised of previous recipients and appointed by the chancellor, sorts through nominations and selects the winners.

Any full-time faculty or staff member is eligible to receive the award as long as he or she hasn't received it in previous years. Winners receive a \$1,000 prize and a plaque.

Brown said he appreciated sharing the moment, and Dyer said the tie made the honor even more special.

"All of us thought that it made it even more special because they couldn't narrow it down but also we could all be together," Dyer said.

In addition to being colleagues, Brown and Dyer are good friends.

"It was really fun to be able to call him up and talk about

that and share that moment with him," Brown said.

Smith said he was surprised and touched by the award in his own way. In his eyes, he said he is just doing what he loves.

"When I started to work at Ole Miss, I couldn't believe that they were going to pay me to go out and talk about a place that I love," Smith said. "I hope that I introduce students to all the positives that are available at the university."

All of last year's recipients emphasized the importance of making a connection with students that may impact their lives.

"When you boil it all down, you realize, as a faculty member, that your relationship with the students is a big one," Dyer said. "That's what it's really all about."

Brown said his relationships with his students have impacted not only them but also him.

"I've had some incredible students," Brown said. "Knowing them and working

with them has made me a better teacher and a better person, and that kind of gives me a sense of responsibility to want to help students when they come to me."

All of last year's recipients agreed that student service is just as big a responsibility as their other work on campus.

"We get a chance to work with students at a very important time of their lives – when they're trying to figure out not just what they want to be but who they want to be," Brown said.

Sufka said he is proud that faculty and staff members can be honored for their work with students.

"It's such an important thing for student welfare, well-being, their future," Sufka said. "And to recognize faculty and staff that play that vital roles and do so in extraordinary ways is what this Frist Award is about."

Nominations may be submitted on the Ole Miss website and are open until 5 p.m. on April 6.

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‘The Fighter’ weaves tale of fate, family, self-discovery

MEGAN SWARTZFAGER
STAFF WRITER

The epigraph of Oxford-based author Michael Farris Smith’s most recent novel, “The Fighter,” reads a quote by John Steinbeck: “To be alive at all is to have scars.” Few quotes could more accurately describe the experience of the protagonist, ex-fighter Jack Boucher, who bears literal and figurative scars from his years spent fighting for money and reveling in the blistered landscape of the Mississippi Delta.

“The Fighter” will be released Tuesday, and Smith is set to read and sign copies at Off Square Books at 5 p.m. to kick off the 25th Oxford Conference for the Book.

Most of the novel takes place well after the successful years of Jack’s prime.

Now, Jack is in his 40s and is battling debilitating headaches and more debilitating regret. Jack’s foster mother, Maryann, lies in a nursing home with advanced dementia and does not have long to live. Meanwhile, Jack, having squandered his earnings from years of fights, has taken out loans against the house signed over to him by Maryann and has borrowed large sums of money from the dangerous Big Momma Sweet. He struggles to redeem his failures by paying off his debt and preventing the bank from foreclosing on Maryann’s home.

Unable to run and risk being away from home when Maryann dies and unable to hide from the far-reaching and murderous grasp of Sweet, Jack realizes he is “living in the immediacy of



PHOTO COURTESY: MICHAEL FARRIS SMITH.COM

have to.”

The concussive brain damage that produces Jack’s headaches engenders a powerful and interesting way of changing setting and perspective. The novel takes place at the intersection of two worlds: the harsh Mississippi Delta and “the blurred world of a rocked mind.” The narrative is shaped by the blistering and wild Delta, and the framing of a concussed mind provides a moving and insightful portrait of Jack, flitting

between past and present. The story delves into Jack’s motivations and eventually shifts the perspective to that of another character just as Jack’s desperation brings him to the brink of collapse.

The novel is brutal throughout, describing in gritty detail all the heartbreak of failure and the pain of not belonging, not to mention physical violence. However, this brutality is tempered by poignancy. Smith’s elegant use of a Cormac McCarthy-esque

disregard for traditional syntax and punctuation empowers him to depict stomach-turning violence and earnest, heartbreaking humanity all in the same paragraph.

Though fraught with desperation, “The Fighter” is ultimately a tale of triumph and deliverance. This deliverance comes from Annette, a young woman who believes herself to be an angel of her own “church of coincidence.”

Annette unwittingly restores Jack’s belief in himself. In Annette, Jack finds that “his own blood did remain in the world but it did not run in the veins of those who put his small feet into the dirt and drove away from the Salvation Army store so many years ago but it flowed through the veins of a young woman. A young woman led by her own conviction. A young woman who had followed him unconcerned about the risk because she believed him to be something to her ...”

In “The Fighter,” Smith weaves a tale of fate and family, desperation and deliverance, secrets and the search for self. This mostly bleak narrative ultimately leaves readers with the idea that meaning and belonging come not in definitive self-discovery but in a willingness to adapt to life’s surprises.

In the flashback that ends the novel, Maryann tells a young Jack, “Life drove up to my house in a white van about seven years ago ... It gave me something honest and tender and it asked me to become something else and I thought I was ready for it. But I wasn’t. And I know I’m different than I was before you came here. And that is what I mean. You will want to know who you are today and tomorrow and the next day for the rest of your life. And that is good.”

Smith’s celebration of the book’s release at Off Square Books on Tuesday will mark the start of this year’s Oxford Conference for the Book. The 25th annual event will run from Wednesday to Friday this week.

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How to beat the post-spring break blues

LEXI PURVIS
STAFF WRITER

After fighting off winter gloom, spring break blooms into the lives of students everywhere. Tragically, spring break comes and goes in a blink of an eye, and after a week of partying on the beach or relaxing on a staycation, it's important to have a game plan to beat the post-spring break blues.

PLAN AHEAD

It's much easier said than done. After a week of putting school completely out of mind, some anxiety is inevitable as the mundane routine of classes creeps its way back into everyday life. A good way to ease some of that anxiety is by taking a couple minutes out of your Sunday and writing out a schedule for the week. Visualizing a list of to-dos will help settle the dreadful feeling of playing catch up.

START SOMETHING NEW

Take this time as a chance to start over. Spring break generally falls around the middle of the semester, and it's never too late to break old habits and create new ones. Maybe you didn't get the spring break body you hoped for, but this is a great time to get back into the gym and start the transformation. This even applies to academics. Perhaps you just checked your midterm grades and your parents aren't exactly thrilled about them. The good news is there's still ample time in the semester to turn things around by adjusting study habits. This is a great point in the year to make that lifestyle change you've been thinking about without the pressure of keeping a New Year's resolution or looking like the cast of "Baywatch" for your trip to Destin.



CALL YOUR PARENTS

They'll appreciate knowing you're still alive after spending the previous seven days driving countless hours to Miami and back with your friends or traveling through Europe. Being away from the normal routine of life is often a necessary break, but it can leave you a little disconnected from your family. Nothing is more comforting than reconnecting with your parents and letting them know how much you appreciate them.

PREPARE FOR THE SUMMER

Now that break is over, it's time to find something else to look forward to, and that can be done by starting the countdown to summer. If you're not exactly sure what your plans are for the summer, then start making a plan so you can have something to work toward and be excited about. It's hard to go through the motions of everyday life without looking forward to anything. Apply for that internship or study abroad in a country you've always dreamed of. Now is the time to start making moves for summer, because before you know it, summer will be here and the spring break blues will be completely forgotten.



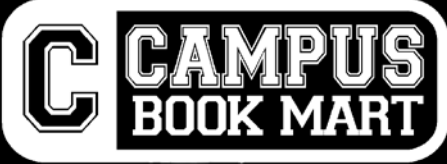
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CONTEST RULES

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Pick winner of Thursday, March 22 game *

☐ Ole Miss

☐ Texas A&M

Pick winner of Friday, March 23 game *


☐ Ole Miss

☐ Texas A&M


3

Winner will be contacted Tues., March 27


Hurry! Contest closes Thursday, March 22 at 4pm



+



=



Start Your Morning Right

THE DAILY MISSISSIPPIAN

Oxford's Morning Newspaper

Braden Thornberry represents US in Palmer Cup

JOSH GOLLIHAR
STAFF WRITER

Junior Braden Thornberry has now added another accolade to his already impressive resume. The Ole Miss golfer was selected this past week to represent the United States in this summer's 2018 Arnold Palmer Cup.

The collegiate version of the Ryder Cup, the Arnold Palmer Cup pits a team of golfers from the United States, which Thornberry will join, against players from all over the world. The 2018 event will take place July 6-8 at the Evian Resort Golf Club in France, where the LPGA hosts a major championship each year. This year's expanded Palmer Cup marks the first time the event will feature both men's and women's collegiate golfers. The 2018 United States team is composed of 12 men and 12 women.

Thornberry was one of the



PHOTO COURTESY: AP PHOTO/QUINN HARRIS

Ole Miss Rebel Braden Thornberry plays the ball from the tee during round four of the 2017 Division I Men's Golf Championships on May 29, 2017. Thornberry will compete in the 2018 Arnold Palmer Cup to represent the United States in July.

11 committee selections for the U.S. team and joins major champions Dustin Johnson, Webb Simpson and Justin Thomas. The United States won the Palmer Cup in 2010 with the help of former Rebel golfer Jonathan Randolph.

This is not the first time Thornberry, an Olive Branch native, will get to represent his country. He competed in the 2017 Walker Cup and

was a pivotal contributor in leading the United States to a win over Great Britain and Ireland.

Currently the defending Haskins Award winner, which establishes him as the nation's best collegiate golfer, Thornberry sits second in the amateur golfer world rankings and will look to carry his success through the Ole Miss season and on to the

Palmer Cup.

The event will be played July 6-8 in France. By that point, the NCAA season will have come to a close, which means the cup could be the last event Thornberry competes in as an amateur and as an Ole Miss Rebel. If this is the case, he could easily end his college career as the top player in school history.

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ACROSS

1 Govt. security
6 Floating platforms
11 It's not PC
14 Four-door
15 Sir ____ Newton was an English mathematician
16 Old English letter
17 Fish illegally
18 Apple juice
19 Spanish aunt
20 Contented sighs
22 Homerun king Hank
24 Official permit
28 Scram!
30 Unbolt
31 Wonderland girl
32 Duplicate
33 Got an earful, in a way
37 Emeritus: Abbr.
38 Dress style
39 Kauai keepsake
40 Abyssinian
43 Rainbow maker
45 Director Welles
46 Irrational fear
47 Lounges
50 Passage in a particular text

DOWN

1 Cookbook abbr.
2 Prefix with classical
3 Room within a harem
4 Tic ____ Dough
5 Improve
6 Nouveau ____
7 Sale sign
8 Craze
9 ____ kwon do
10 Deal with poison ivy, in a way
11 Paris subway
12 "Farewell!"
13 Repeat rhythmically
21 Invite
23 Sheltered, nautically
24 Monetary gain
25 Small bay

SOLUTION TO 3.9.2018 PUZZLE

MESS GROSS LAME
EDIT AERIE ISIS
AGGRANDIZE OPTS
NAMING GEMINATE
TRAVELS SEDER
EWING DISTIL
ARFS NEOS OSAGE
SEL AGAINST MOS
SNAPS KNEE RETE
TAGEND GENRE
EPEES ROISTER
NEOPRENE REPEAL
IDLE JARDINIERE
NEER ARIOT TUTS
ARTY YENTA EPOS

26 Fabric
27 Ages
28 First American to orbit Earth
29 Leprechaun land
31 Birdlike
33 Mixed bags
34 Excuse
35 Gum
36 Joltin' Joe
38 Basilica area
41 Very small quantity
42 Brother of Electra
43 Ancient Egyptian king

44 Slender bar
46 Seed of a legume
47 Goatlike antelope
48 Spanish hero
49 Link with
50 Mob scenes
52 "Stay" singer Lisa
55 Turkish general
56 Bikini part
58 Law enforcement agency
59 Purge
60 Suffix with Capri
61 Conscription org.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12 13

14 15 16 17 18 19 20 21 22 23 24 25 26 27 28 29 30 31 32 33 34 35 36 37 38 39 40 41 42 43 44 45 46 47 48 49 50 51 52 53 54 55 56 57 58 59 60 61 62 63 64 65 66 67

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4				6		3	2	
		9						1
			4		9		8	
		5					4	8
1	3					5		
	6		1		7			
3						7		
	7	8		9				5

HOW TO PLAY

Complete the grid so that every row, column and 3x3 box contains the numbers 1 through 9 with no repeats.

DIFFICULTY LEVEL TOUGH

5	9	1	4	6	3	8	7	2
4	6	7	9	8	2	1	5	3
2	3	8	7	5	1	4	6	9
9	7	5	8	4	6	2	3	1
3	1	6	2	7	5	9	4	8
8	4	2	1	3	9	5	6	7
7	8	9	6	1	4	3	2	5
1	5	4	3	2	7	6	8	9
6	2	3	5	6	8	7	1	4

Ole Miss keeps winning, clinches series over UT

LOGAN CONNER

STAFF WRITER

After dropping the first game of this year's SEC opening series against Tennessee, Ole Miss erased all doubts Saturday and Sunday by posting dominant wins over the visiting Volunteers.

On the mound for Sunday's finale, James McArthur threw six innings without allowing a run, putting the team en route to a 5-0 Ole Miss series clincher. The right-hander controlled the game and posted four strikeouts before handing the reins over in the seventh to Parker Caracci, who held the Volunteers scoreless for the rest of the day.

Offensively, the hitting remained hot. To lead off the game for the Rebels, Jacob Adams hit a solo shot over the right field wall. He scored again in the fifth inning when Ryan Olenek doubled to left and put Ole Miss up 2-0. Olenek finished the day 2-4 with an RBI.

As the pitching kept the Volunteers at bay, sophomore Cole Zabowski extended the lead to three with a solo home run of his own in the sixth. To ice the series cake, Thomas Dillard added on with a two-run blast, and Ole Miss carried the 5-0 score to victory.

Twenty-one games into the 2018 season, Ole Miss now finds itself 2-1 in SEC play and currently sits at No. 6 in the nation, thanks to an overall record of 19-2. After series against Eastern Illinois, Georgia State and Tennessee during Spring Break, the Rebels will look to continue their streak of great play against New Orleans on Tuesday.

Entering the spring break week on a four-game win streak, the Rebels were adamant about maintaining their positive momentum in a home series against Eastern Illinois. In a doubleheader that featured 7-2 and 4-0 wins, the Rebels controlled the Panthers at the plate and



PHOTO BY: CHRISTIAN JOHNSON

Ole Miss pitcher Parker Caracci closes out the game against Tennessee on Sunday ending in a 5-0 victory.

dominated both sides of the field. Sophomore Thomas Dillard continued his strong season with another home run and four runs scored throughout the 18-inning marathon. The following Sunday, Ole Miss completed its sweep of the Panthers with an emphatic 7-3 win.

During the week, the Rebels traveled to Atlanta for a series with Georgia State. The Georgia State Panthers came into the series on fire after sweeping Samford in Birmingham. Despite out-hitting the Rebels in Game 1, Georgia State's Panthers failed to continue their success, and Ole Miss was able to win its eighth game in a row, 5-3 on Thursday. After falling behind early, the Rebels took the lead in the sixth inning and rode the play of pitchers Will Ethridge, Parker Caracci and Dallas Woolfolk to a win.

After squeezing out a

first-game victory, Ole Miss returned Wednesday and dominated Georgia State in a 16-2 win. The Rebels scored the first 14 runs and only allowed two hits, both in the eighth inning. Six Rebels recorded multi-run games, and four recorded multi-hit games. With the win, the Rebels were able to tie the best win percentage in the NCAA at .944.

After finishing non-conference play with one of the best starts in Ole Miss baseball history, the Rebels opened their conference schedule with a series at Swayze against Tennessee over the weekend.

Despite entering Game 1 with wins in 17 of the last 18 games, the Rebel bullpen struggled to stop the Tennessee offense Friday. After beginning the game with a two-run first inning, the Rebels were able to hold

Tennessee to only two runs through the sixth inning.

Then things got crazy.

In a classic Friday-night

shootout, the seventh inning consisted of a combined 10 runs: six by the Volunteers and four by the Rebels. After allowing two runs in the first six innings, pitcher Ryan Rolison allowed three more in the seventh and was replaced by Ethridge, who also saw three Volunteers score. Ole Miss was unable to recover from the explosive inning, and Tennessee handed the Rebels their second loss of the year.

On Saturday, the Rebels were able to bounce back from the close loss with a series-tying 7-1 win. Pitcher Brady Feigl continued his impressive season with another stellar performance and only allowed four hits and one run through six innings. Led by three-run offensive performances by Grae Kessinger and Jacob Adams, the Rebels showed no sign of slowing down en route to their 18th win of the season.

After clinching the Tennessee series Sunday, the No. 6 Rebels have made an early statement on the national stage; this year, Ole Miss is gunning for Omaha. Rebel baseball will now turn its attention to a Tuesday morning home matchup with New Orleans, with the first pitch scheduled for 11 a.m.

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COLUMN

Kermit Davis can lead Rebel basketball to new heights

FLINT CHRISTIAN
STAFF WRITER

The announcement of Kermit Davis' hiring as head coach of the Ole Miss basketball team brings a promising new look to the program.

Davis, who was previously the head coach at Middle Tennessee State, is best known for his 2016 trip to the NCAA Tournament, during which the Blue Raiders shocked the nation by upsetting No. 2 seed Michigan State 90-81 as a No. 15 seed. However, his success extends beyond that year. Davis-led Middle Tennessee teams also made NCAA Tournament appearances in 2013 and in 2017 when they pulled another upset over No. 5 seed Minnesota.

Tournament success aside, Davis' coaching style and demeanor are an excellent fit for Ole Miss.

One problem the Rebels have faced in recent years is recruiting at a high level. Though recruiting success doesn't always translate to wins on the court, one could argue that the best team under former head coach Andy Kennedy was the 2013 Marshall Henderson-led SEC Tournament champions. That team also happened to be the product of Kennedy's



PHOTO COURTESY: AP PHOTO/MARK ZALESKI

Middle Tennessee coach Kermit Davis celebrates after the team's 82-64 win over Western Kentucky on March 1. Davis will be joining the Ole Miss staff as head coach for the men's basketball team.

top-ranked recruiting classes strung together.

On the court, Davis brings a set system from Middle Tennessee that has a specific kind of player he can attract, train and develop. Davis employs the 1-3-1 zone on defense, which Ole Miss fans might recognize from Kennedy's occasional foray into the system. The unique look of the 1-3-1 often causes confusion, turnovers and easy,

fast-break buckets as players disrupt the normal passing lanes opposing teams look for. Davis used the system to great effect at Middle Tennessee, and his Blue Raiders teams finished in the top 30 nationally in points allowed per game in four of the past six years.

With a program that has struggled to recruit top-level prospects, the idea of a defensive-minded system that places emphasis on effort, repetition and athleticism

rather than offensive skill is tantalizing.

Before Davis can recruit his own starting five, he has to utilize the current Ole Miss roster, for which his schemes fit perfectly. Davis' zone system relies on quickness and length rather than bulk and strength, and his guard-heavy Middle Tennessee teams often played without a center. The Rebels have often done the same in recent seasons, and their top returning players are guards

Terence Davis, Breein Tyree and Devontae Shuler and forward Bruce Stevens, who should all plug right into the new head coach's system.

On offense, Davis prefers to slow down the game and wind the shot clock. The steadier pace should lead to better shots and shot selection, especially coming off of a year when the Rebels took the 80th-most 3-pointers at a 31.9 percent conversion rate, good for only 324th nationally.

Though his Middle Tennessee teams speak for themselves, questions do come with Davis' hire:

Can his 1-3-1 zone stand up to athletic firepower from Kentucky, Florida and other SEC teams, considering Davis often played with an athletically superior Middle Tennessee team?

Can Davis recruit well enough to compete with the rising competition in the SEC?

Will Davis outperform the pressure and win early and often enough to not live in the shadow of Andy Kennedy?

Given his resume of success, coaching style and inherited cast, head coach Kermit Davis is ready to answer these questions and looks to give Ole Miss a fresh renovation defined by success.



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